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ABSTRACT

This study reviews current research aimed at identifying problems and providing remedies to prevent students from dropping out of high school. This study concentrates on the perceptions of Hispanic males who have dropped out of high school. A combination of self-reported individual and family characteristics and self-reported perceptions concerning school conditions responsible for the decision to drop out are studies. Participants for this study were comprised of seven male Hispanics ages 18 to 23, who dropped out of high school. The areas identified by participants as causes for dropping out of school were: (1) feelings of abandonment by the student prior to making a decision to drop out of school; and (2) the perceived lack of two-way communication between the student and those trying to help him. Results from the study showed that more attention needs to be focused on schooling experiences and perceptions of Hispanics who drop out of school in order to gain insight into the total context of the dropout problems. (Contains 50 references.) (SR)

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Counseling Implications for Male Hispanic Dropouts: Forging a Prevention Program

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Hispanic students are dropping out of high school at an alarming rate. The consequences to young Hispanics who drop out of high school affect both the individual's potential as well as the nation's economic and social well being (Velez & Fernandez 1994). In 1990, Nicolau and Ramos addressed this high attrition rate by stating, "If special steps are not taken to help Hispanic parents prepare their children for school...the gap between their skills and those of their peers will continue to widen as they go from grade to grade (p. 9)." Leaving school prematurely becomes more of a disadvantage as time goes on because dropouts have fewer opportunities to remain competitive in the job market (Perez & Salazar, 1993). Measures need to be taken to assist these young people to stay in school and become better educated in order to be successful citizens of the future. However, before measures can be taken to ensure students remain in school, reasons for dropping out need to be identified and remedied (Ramos & Nieto, 1991).

Watt, Guajardo, and Markman (1987) studied family characteristics, family practices and perceptions, student characteristics, and academic performance and school involvement of three groups of Hispanics labeled achievers, strugglers, and dropouts. The achievers were found to be correlated with the higher social class because their parents, who were typically better educated, interacted with them more often through reading and modeled a higher commitment to literacy. As a result the achievers were more likely to begin and end their educational careers with higher classroom performance than either the

strugglers or dropouts. True, Ammon, and Cudaback (1994) reaffirmed this correlation claiming the education of both parents was the most powerful predictor of the educational success for their children.

Macias (1992) cited limited English proficiency as a potential barrier to improved educational status for Hispanics. According to this research, the need to learn English fluently while maintaining the native language was crucial for Hispanics to compete in the future workforce. Marcia also claimed a second language would be instrumental to productivity and opportunity.

Perez and Salazar (1993) examined recent Census data and other relevant research concerning Hispanic population trends and its impact on education. Their research supported earlier studies completed by several researchers (Ekstron, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Rumberger, 1987). They found socioeconomic status (SES) and aspects of family background were the factors most consistently linked to Hispanics dropping out of school Other researchers pointed out another factor of dropping out was living in a single parent home (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986; Velex, 1989; Reyes & Valencia, 1993). Ramos and Nieto (1991) claimed that single-parent status alone could not be responsible for so many students dropping out.

Wallace (1985) studied the school dropout problem by reviewing related research and identified causes for Hispanics leaving school as poverty, problems with literacy, failure, and repeating a grade in school, conflict and alienation, and deviant social behavior. National Council la Raza (1990) indicated

Hispanic students were more likely to be retained for two or more grades than any other racial group. Grade retention among Hispanic students was a major reason why they dropped out. Students who repeated a grade were behind their age peers and tended to feel ashamed for being older than their classmates which correlating with dropping out of school (Fernandez & Velez, 1990).

Other researchers reported a loss of interest in school, boredom, personal reasons, and the need to work were factors contributing to dropping out (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986; Orum, 1986; Orum, 1988). These studies concluded poor grades may be linked to other issues such as poor living conditions, family difficulties, or negative school experiences.

Other school-related problems such as discipline problems, suspension from school, cutting classes, absenteeism, poor academic performance were all related to decisions for leaving school. Mainstream dropout research tended to blame dropout students for these school-related problems projecting the dropout image as deviant, deficient, or negligent with regard to education and schooling. Ramos and Nieto (1991) reiterated the concept these factors may actually have been a result of poor schooling and a lack of academic success rather than reasons for dropping out.

Testing was also found to be a barrier to positive educational experiences for Hispanics (Valencia & Aburto, 1991). The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that no improvements have been made by Hispanics since 1971. Test scores were very low at that time with the current situation continuing

to worsen. Three out of four Hispanic eighth graders could not pass a test of simple mathematical operations using decimals or fractions (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990). Almost 50 percent of the Hispanics who took the "High School and Beyond" achievement tests in both 1980 and 1982 scored in the lowest quartile of those tested (Bureau of the Census, 1985).

The impact of high school athletic participation was studied by Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen (1992). Findings indicated sports participation was significantly related to lower dropout rates for some minority youth. However, this finding did not apply to dropout rates for Hispanic males. Rural Hispanic males actually experienced a decline in educational expectations as a result of sports participation; however, atheletic participation had an impact on school attendance for suburban Hispanic males. Sport participation was positively related to self-reported popularity and extracurricular involvement. Earlier studies done by Picou (1978) and Wells and Picou (1980) indicated similar results. However, a study centering on interscholastic athletics found participation is more likely to strengthen rather than interfere with the academic achievement of high school students (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984).

Kramer (1990) surveyed and identified Hispanic at-risk students to measure perceptions of themselves as learners and their beliefs about school. Her conclusions were students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers affected their educational experiences. She also found that academic performance for at-risk students was poor and that students were unsure how

they were supposed to go about the learning process. In addition, these students had little interaction with teachers unless it was negative. Students seldom had feedback concerning lessons. She also found that at-risk students could not name a teacher or counselor they would feel free to ask for assistance with school work or personal problems.

Researchers who analyzed data from the "High School and Beyond" study, Fernandez & Shu, (1988) found Hispanics continued to have higher dropout rates even when they did not display the traditional reasons for dropping out. A finding from this data indicated that many Hispanic students, whether dropouts or not, expressed negative feelings about their schools .

Ramos and Nieto (1991) pointed out traditional dropout research has focused on individual student and family characteristics and has largely neglected social and political problematic areas such as school policies and practices, the value placed on race, ethnicity, and language, and students' feelings of not belonging. Components relating to these social and political problems needing to be examined include school curriculum and climate, policies and practices discouraging students from staying in school, and the quality of interactions among teachers, students, and parents.

Valdivieso (1986) claimed school reforms have not worked for Hispanics. He stated, "A majority of Hispanic students have not had access, for a number of reasons, to a curriculum that prepared them for either higher education or decent jobs in the primary labor market. Many students are not being prepared to be informed

and active adult citizens in our democracy." Pulido (1991) found effective school characteristics resulted in higher retention rates for Hispanics. His findings emphasized having a multicultural environment, including Hispanic staffing, preventative dropout programs, strong instructional leadership, fair and accepted discipline practices, and positive and caring staff attitudes.

The present study concentrated on the perceptions of Hispanic males ages 18-23 who had dropped out of high school. Although potential dropouts have been studied, little information seemed to be available concerning the perceptions of those who have actually dropped out of school. The goal of the study was to examine a combination of self-reported individual and family characteristics and self-reported perceptions concerning school conditions responsible for the decision to drop out.

This qualitative research study sought to analyze and intrepret personal testimonies regarding male Hispanic school dropout experiences. Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was utilized to generate theory through discovery. Interpretive-ethnographic methods provided the basis for analyzing and intrepreting social interaction. Geertz (1973) and Denzin (1988) defined interpretivists as going beyond mere reporting to describing and probing the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of the action. They further stated an interpretivist emphasizes experience is not only cognitive but also includes emotions.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were comprised of seven male Hispanics ages 18-23 from Southwest Kansas who have dropped out of high school. These Hispanic males were from two Southwest Kansas counties and attended two of the area's largest high schools both having approximately 25 percent Hispanic populations. Approximately 12 percent of the students of the total school enrollment dropped out of school during the 1993-94 school term. At least 45 percent of these were Hispanic.

The population of the two counties is approximately 50,000, and one third is under age 18. The Hispanic population in the two counties is approximately 20 percent according to a 1993 project of Kansas Action for Children, Inc.

The researcher contacted friends, relatives, and acquaintances in Southwest Kansas to locate Hispanic males who had dropped out of school. Eleven potential participants were located and seven met the interview criteria being a male Hispanic dropout in Southwest Kansas and under the age of 25.

The researcher met twice with each participant. The first interview lasted one and one half hours with the participant doing the talking. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study. The interview was informal with the participant explaining his background and school experiences. Questions were used as a guide only if the participant had difficulty thinking about what to say. The last fifteen minutes were spent debriefing. Participants were assured

their conversation would be handled confidentially. During the first interview, the participant chose a nick-name to be used in the research to further assure confidentiality.

The second interview lasted thirty minutes. Clarification of specific items from the first interview was the focus. Two participants met a third time with the researcher for fifteen minutes each to provide information missed during the first two interviews. The first interviews were recorded and the later interviews were documented through descriptive and analytic field notes.

Results

The summary of findings were reported as individual and family characteristics and schooling experiences, perceptions, and attitudes.

Individual and Family Characteristics

1. At the time of interviews, 5 of the 7 participants were either 18 or 19 years old and the other two were 20 and 23 respectively. Five of the participants were born in southwest Kansas, one was born in central Kansas, and one was born in Texas. All of the young men grew up in southwest Kansas.

2. Two of the participants were married with one child, 3 lived with their biological parents, and one lived with his biological mother and step-father. One participant lived with his biological mother in a single parent home.

3. All participants were from lower middle class, blue collar working families. In all families, both parents worked either full or part time.

4. The size of families varied for the participants. Two were from large families of five or more siblings. four were from middle sized families of 3 or 4 siblings, and one was from a small family with only one sibling.

5. All participants were of Mexican-American heritage. Both parents of 5 participants were Mexican-American. Two mothers were non-Hispanic and all fathers were Mexican-American. One had a Mexican-American step father.

6. Mothers had a higher average of years of schooling than the fathers; but fathers had a wider range of years of education. Five mothers attained a high school diploma and the other two had 10 and 11 years of education. Two fathers attained college degrees, two attained high school diplomas, and one had 10 years of schooling. Two fathers had four years of education from Mexico.

7. All the participants' first language was English. Only 2 were fluent in Spanish as a second language and a third participant was somewhat fluent in Spanish as a second language. He reported fluency with "cuss" words. Four participants did not know a second language even though most of their parents could speak Spanish fluently. The 2 participants whose fathers came from Mexico with a fourth grade education were the only 2 who could speak Spanish fluently.

8. Spanish was the first language for most of the participants' parents. Spanish was the first language for 5 mothers while Spanish was the first language of all the fathers. All mothers, except one who was non-Hispanic, were fluent in both

Spanish and English. All fathers, except one, were fluent in English as a second language; the latter was partially fluent.

9. Most of the participants observed both languages spoken at home. Two reported that only English was spoken at home. Two participants reported that English and Spanish were spoken equally and three reported that English was usually spoken at home but that the parents often spoke Spanish to friends and other family members. The two married participants spoke only English at home because they married non-Hispanics who did not speak Spanish.

10. Only one participant could read and write Spanish while the rest reported they could not.

11. None of the participants reported language as being a factor in the decision to drop out of school.

Schooling

12. Most of the participants were 17 when they dropped out of high school, one was 16 and two others were 18.

13. Most of the participants dropped out at the eleventh grade. Only one dropped out at the ninth grade and two dropped out during the tenth grade.

14. All participants repeated at least one grade with two repeating two grades. Three dropped out of the grade they repeated. Four repeated a grade in the primary years, two repeated grades during middle school, and three repeated a grade in high school.

15. Most of the particpants were B and C students in elementary school. One was an A student during the elementary and middle school years. Grades began slipping for all participants

during the middle school years. Only two retained the B and C status and four made grades C and below. All participants grades slipped even farther in high school. All seven reported grades C and below in high school with most grades being Ds and Fs.

16. The majority of the participants did not participate in extra curricular activities. Only two reported being involved in activities which included football, baseball, wrestling, and rodeo team. Reasons for not being involved in extra curricular activites were:

"I didn't feel wanted and then my grades were too low."

"I just didn't want to."

"I wanted to get away from school to get high."

"I wanted to hang around with my friends. I tried football but I didn't think the coach was fair. I never got to play."

17. None of the participants were referred for counseling before dropping out of school. When participants were asked why they thought they were not referred, they responded with the following remarks:

"Why would they? They didn't want me there."

"I don't know."

"They probably didn't know what to do with me."

"I think counselors just figure out schedules. Why would I talk to them?"

"The counselors were coaches and they were prejudiced anyway."

18. None of the participants were referred for special services such as special education or Chapter I. Only one was tested for hearing in the fifth grade and found that he was hearing impaired. No services were offered to the participant as he reported that "it wasn't that bad." Another comment was, "They didn't have me go to special classes cause they prob'ly didn't think it would do any good, noway."

19. Participants spoke about things they liked about school. Four participants reported that they enjoyed physical education, gym, or sports. Two reported they enjoyed drafting or algebra while three others reported that they liked being around friends. Only one participant couldn't think of anything he liked about school.

20. Things not liked about school were more numerous. Four reported not liking school work or homework. One claimed that subjects were boring and one just didn't like "having to go to school." Thirteen negative comments were made concerning teachers. Things not liked about school which concerned teachers were:

"pressures from teachers"

"coaches not being fair"

"the way teachers acted toward me, like I was nothin"

"feeling not wanted by teachers, not feeling welcome"

"teachers who were bad, who didn't care"

"the way teachers put me down"

"teachers wouldn't help me with my lessons"

"teachers treated me like I was dumb"

Out of 19 comments about what participants did not like about school, teachers and coaches were mentioned 13 times. They were not mentioned once as something participants liked about school.

21. Although teachers were mentioned often as what was not liked about school, four participants admitted to having a favorite teacher. Two stated that they didn't have a favorite but claimed to have "a few nice ones and two who gave me a second chance." Only one participant stated that he could not think of a single favorite teacher. Six out of seven participants had positive things to say about at least one teacher.

The most mentioned reason for liking a teacher was that the teacher cared enough to explain a problem in different ways until it was understood. Other comments concerning a favorite teacher included:

> "He showed us how to get an answer to problems instead of telling us, explained things over and over 'till we understood; helped me with my work, and encouraged us.
>
> "All students liked him, he was good to everyone, treated me like a regular person, didn't raise his voice, and cared about all of us."
>
> "We could communicate, she treated me good, we talked about other things besides school, and she made me feel welcomed to class."
>
> "He didn't give me no problems and made me feel good to be there."
>
> "He was always jokin, he had a good sense of humor."

22. Paricipants told of traits and characteristics of least

favorite teachers in general. Least favorite teachers were described as being mean, sarcastic, prejudiced, or hateful. Eleven comments were made concerning how teachers "treated" participants that caused them to feel badly. The most frequent statement was, "The teacher treated me like he didn't like me." Other statements included:

The teacher...

"treated me different from other kids, treated me bad in front of others; made me feel like I shouldn't be there"

"blamed me for things that went wrong or put me down a lot"

"didn't explain things; wouldn't help me; yelled and griped at me"

"singled me out for things others were doing; treated me dumb"

"didn't want to know me; didn't care about me; didn't respect me"

"didn't teach; was boring and bossy; was a poor teacher; was into authority and demanding; too strict; " didn't care whether I did my work; had pets and it wasn't me; didn't treat me welcome; didn't care if I did my work"

23. Self-reported expectations of family, school personnel, and friends concerning schooling revealed that family members of the participants provided the most support for them to complete high school. One young man said, "My family really wanted me to

finish. My parents would give me a ride to school and waited 'till I went in before they left." Mothers were mentioned as the most supportive family member. One participant stated, "My mom expected me to finish and when I didn't, she wanted me to get my GED. My grandma really wanted me to stay in school, too. I took my mom's advice." Only one participant didn't receive family support and stated that he was pretty much on his own.

School administrators and teachers were less supportive according to participants. Only two stated that they were encouraged to stay in school by teachers with one admitting that one teacher talked him into staying longer. Other comments made by the young men included:

> "No support, they were glad when I left."
>
> "They couldn't have cared less, the principal told me if I didn't want to be there...not to be there! So I put my things down and left."
>
> "They told me I needed a diploma but they really didn't care...they kicked me out for being absent from being suspended..don't make no sense to me. When I came back from suspension, they told me I had too many absenses and that I was kicked out for good."

All participants strongly felt that administrators did not want them in school any longer. Phrases stated in various ways from all participants were, "They couldn't have cared less, they really didn't care, they didn't mean what they said because they really didn't care, they simply didn't care, they didn't care because they said I wasn't doin' any good there."

Friends were supportive of the participants personally, but not necessarily toward staying in school. Expressions such as, "They didn't care if I stayed in school. They wanted me to do my own thing," were made by all the participants.

24. Participants spoke of the instruction in the schools as being the job of the teacher. One young man stated, "I think it (instruction) is tied up with the way the teacher is...most don't teach..I think they like to hear themselves talk...just havin' a conversation with themselves." Another participant summed up the way instruction was handled as, "teachers talk, students listen, the teacher asks a few questions, then we had tests..mostly on Fridays." One participant related that part of the problem of the instructional process was himself as he said, "I think I was just hard headed. The teacher would explain work and then have us do it. I didn't learn much. I didn't always know what was goin' on. I didn't want to learn so it affected how they taught me." Another interesting comment indicating there was little motivation for the participant was, "Teacher talks, you listen...(I slept)..take a test..(I flunk). I didn't learn much cause I didn't want to. Nobody made me want to."

25. The climate of the school was identified by participants as being a lonely place to be. Feelings of being alone, being frustrated, not belonging, not feeling wanted were mentioned by most participants. Comments were made such as "I wasn't wanted so I got in fights; I knew I had to go but I didn't like how I felt when I was there; I always felt alone, I don't like to be alone; pressure was always on for grades or assignments...NOT friendly;

it made me not want to be there; caused my attitude to be bad and I felt like fighting a lot." One slight positive note concerning climate was made by one participant, "I felt ok walking in to see my friends..the rest was boring and depressing."

26. Self-reported perceptions of measures of achievement in terms of student assessment was described in terms of tests and quizzes. Six out of seven reported that they did not do well being "tested" in school. Two particpants stated that they were better at "showing" people what they knew and would like for teachers to consider other ways of finding out what they knew other than testing. One comment was, "I felt dumb in most classes cause I knew more than the test said and I didn't get to let anyone know."

27. The effectiveness of the principal's leadership solicited negative as well as positive comments. Most participants didn't believe the principals were very effective. One stated what he thought the principal should be do. He said, "I think the principal should make sure that teachers teach, I mean "really teach" because I didn't see much of that happening." Most reported the leadership of the principal as, "not very good, not very effective, or very low." Another young man defended the principal by saying, "Maybe he can't help it that the teachers aren't all nice." One participant out of seven liked the principal personally. He stated, "The principal is the leader and I like him. He cracks down when students get rowdy. I'd rate him as average for his leadership." All seven participants felt the principal had an important job and most didn't think principals did a good job of improving the quality of instruction.

One participant told how he thought administrators could have kept him in school, "I think I coulda passed if I had been in In School Suspension all year. There was nothin to do in there but work. I coulda passed before the year was up. We could use the computers and I like that. I like workin with my hands, not just listening to teachers talk and read and write."

28. All participants thought it was important for parents to be involved in school; however, only two reported parental involvement in any way. In both cases, the mother became involved so that teachers would treat their sons nicer. One participant stated, "Parent support is very important so they won't dump you completely, parents can help out, mine did sometimes when things got rough for me." Reasons for parents to be involved included support in sports and improved treatment from teachers and administrators.

29. The three most reported problems participants were not doing school work, fighting, and absenteeism. Poor grades and talking back to teachers were also problems for participants. One participant reported being a class clown. Reported reasons for problems included drugs, pressures from teachers, boredom, and not being able to read. Five participants reported self-related reasons such as: having a short temper, being hardheaded, not paying attention, and peers. One participant told of particular situation that haunted him, "I had a lot of homework and stuff and just couldn't handle it. I was on probation from doing dumb stuff..for a year. My friend just died and the pressure was just too much. I watched him get beat to death with a ball bat. He

was my best friend. I couldn't think...my mind was a blank. The pressure was just too much." Most participants blamed themselves for their problems.

30. Five of the participants reported that the school administration suggested that they quit school and work on their GEDs. Three received their notification of passing their GEDs before their graduating class graduated. One had passed two of the six tests required for the GED and expected to be finished within two months. Two more expressed a desire to obtain their GEDs and then take college classes. Only one participant stated that he didn't plan to pursue a GED at this time.

31. Most of the participants had future plans which required more training or education than they had. Four participants expressed a desire to go on to college or vocational school. One has a job working in his father's business and hopes to become partners in the future. Two participants had no idea what they wanted to do in the future. One stated, "I have no idea what I might do in the future. I just get from day to day. I don't like to think about the future, just go day by day." Three of the participants mentioned living day to day. One young man said it was the only way he could survive without being depressed.

One participant explained his frustration about the high school he attended by saying, "I think schools give up on kids too soon. They just let you go along...like floatin' in a boat with no oars to get no place. I wish they would have let me have the oars so I could have done some good. I wish they would have said, 'We can help you..and whatever it was...I would have

tried...maybe.' I makes you feel awful when they say you might as well leave...you are not doin' any good here. I probably didn't try but I didn't know what to do to try...then I had a bad attitude and talked back to teachers cause they didn't care about me."

Implications for Counseling

It is important for education, especially counseling, within the modern community to provide services which go beyond a clinical perspective. This means improved self-esteem does not always result in students becoming academically capable. A systemic, comprehensive, multidimensional approach which can address the individual needs of a diverse population requires substantial commitment from the community, educators, parents and students, and counselors. Development of a program to address dynamic student issues involves the refinement of organizational structure, calibration of procedural practices, comprehensive instructional strategies, and a dramatic effort to systematically address educational inequity (Kushman & Kinney, 1989).

This report provides an assessment within the Hispanic population. There are substantial barriers to achievement for them, which reflect the lack of adaptation to American culture. One of the more energized conflicts exists regarding responsibility for adaptation. A multicultural approach indicates the importance of both the minority and majority culture assuming this burden. While not attaining at the level of whites,

Hispanics have comparable aspirations and interests of other students, but are aware of "realistic hurdles", and respond accordingly (Casas, J. & Arbona, C., 1992). To combat these challenges, supplementary experiences are necessary. Opportunities to interact with successful Hispanics, productively engage a diversity of students for exposure to social skills, mentors who can inform and nurture while maintaining high expectations, and administrators who will support them through the maze created by enmeshed appearances and realities. Professional commitment and personal dedication are both important for the Spanish Speaking/Surnamed.

Clearly, most schools have the capability to initiate, cultivate, and extend comprehensive efforts which address the needs of all students (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988). The results of this study indicate that most of these drop-outs were capable and "motivated because they studied for their G.E.D Exams. Time after time in these interviews, it is striking how systematically the youth are not only discouraged from being active participants in the student culture, but are prevented from engaging in activities. For this reason, it is important for counseling and coaching to be assigned to different people. Therefore, the long-established practice of using the cost-cutting practice of combining administrative tasks (scheduling and scholarship selection) with counseling is destructive to systematic program development.

Also, there is some evidence in this group of dropouts that they, simply, did not know how to succeed. While it is satisfying

to believe that innate intelligence is the leading contributor to academic achievement, there is a great deal to be said for socialization, i.e., learning the rules for winning. One of the more disappointing characteristics of schools is the tendency to believe that ability alone provides the means for success. In fact, it is as likely that graduation means one learns the rules for interacting with adults and receiving their favor. Therefore, if there is a desire to empower and affirm the at-risk population, teach them the rules and skills of mastery. This means providing workshops at night on test-taking, note taking, systematic reading - how and what to learn. If combined with peer counseling, the tutoring can include opportunities to write and communicate with those who can personalize the information and initiate those at-risk to ingratiation.

Culturally, the Hispanic population presents issues which contradict and may threaten conventional American value system(s). First, there are several distinct groups within what is termed the Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish-Speaking/Surnamed (SSS) population. The U.S. strategy which tends toward "standardization" is challenged by the variety with SSS groups. In fact, this is a nettlesome issue for American schools and communities emanating from minority groups, generally. Therefore, the youth in this study literally plead for treatment as individuals rather than stereotypes. Positive relationships between educators and students is promising strategy to reduce this influence. This is likely facilitated by learning the Spanish language. While fluency is desirable, a great deal can be accomplished by

achieving comfort in communication. At a minimal level, it communicates to the student a willingness to personally initiate contact.

Also, educators can learn a great deal about developing relationships with a variety of students. There is a great deal to indicate that administrators, teachers and counselors are more comfortable working with students who are most like themselves. Others indicate that those who are young, attractive, verbally skilled, intelligent and successful are more likely to be desirable clients. Reducing personal barriers to relationship development is a critical activity for schools. In fact, it seems an important life skill involves the ability to relate to an ever-increasing number of people. Yet, these youth felt no human contact within the schools, except from their peer group. As we consider personal experiences with school, it is doubtful any teacher, administrator or counselor became successful without the active support of a non-exploitive, adult friend.

Related to culture is a dominance of spirituality and celebration in the Hispanic worldview (Padilla, A., Ruiz, R. & Alvarez, R., 1989). This perspective includes a mind-body relationship which is far less compartmentalized and more closely associated than in the western orientation. One outcome is that the traditional clinical model may be resisted. Therefore, strategies which are more informal and allow for less intrusive methods seem warranted. This means, support groups which are lead by or significantly include Hispanics who are already successful can be authorized and facilitated by Counselors. Also, networks

of informal support can be organized by the school to provide for transportation, nutrition and child care without costing the community anything. Also, it is important for the Counselor to initiate methods and means for success within the at-risk group to celebrate and give recognition.

There is a tendency for dropouts to fade away. It indicates a certain professional shame that these youth are not engaged in a meaningful way even as we expel them. Consequently, there is no need to learn from a possible error, and the unpleasant task of detachment occur "spontaneously". In this research, some youth were not really sure they were a dropout. The irony of alienation and the lack of school identity is unmistaken and unavoidable. A reasonable alternative is to initiate an exit interview with youth who dropout and their families. In effect, this is the format of this project. It provides the youth with voice and the professional educator with feedback. Both are valuable because the dropout status does not appear permanent. Youth become adults and can potentially re-engage the educational system. The information provided at exit can facilitate their re-entry.

Finally, there is an opportunity for School and Human Service Counselors to empower themselves. Each of the needs articulated within the results of this study indicate a challenge for which Counselors are prepared to engage. In invites them to make a personal commitment to engage the at-risk population, not because they are ordered to by administration, school board or the National Teachers Association, but because it is right. The commitment invites the Counselor to remember the initial calling

to the field. It was not to garner the most scholarships for youth who really can be taught to do it themselves, or replace this important activity in parenting. Rather, Professional Counselors engage the field because they want to make a difference. The youth in this study teach us how this can be accomplished. It requires engaging a multicultural perspective in Counseling, making contact with all students as individuals, facilitate students finding a way through a shared humanity to become all that is possible, and providing all students opportunity when they are developmentally ready.

This research study developed a basis for understanding the perceptions and attitudes of male Hispanics who have dropped out of high school in southwest Kansas. The interviews with the dropouts provided insights into problematic areas that parallel those areas identified by current research. Two areas were identified by participants as causes for dropping out of school were feelings of abandonment by the student prior to making a decision to drop out of school and the perceived lack of two-way communication between the student and those trying to help him. These findings were noted by all participants.

Traditional research focused primarily on personal, family, social, and economic factors to develop theories why Hispanics drop out of school. These areas are relevant to understanding the dropout problem but only in part. Attention also needs to be more comprehensive and focus on schooling experiences and perceptions in addition to traditional factors in order to gain insight into the total context of the dropout problems.

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